

SENATE RECORD VOTE ANALYSIS

105th Congress
1st Session

Vote No. 168

July 10, 1997, 6:05 pm
Page S-7182 Temp. Record

DEFENSE AUTHORIZATION/Defense Funds to Veterans' Affairs

SUBJECT: National Defense Authorization Act for fiscal year 1998 . . . S. 936. Thurmond motion to table the Wellstone modified amendment No. 668.

ACTION: MOTION TO TABLE AGREED TO, 58-41

SYNOPSIS: As reported, S. 936, the National Defense Authorization Act for fiscal year 1998, will authorize a total of \$268.2 billion in budget authority for national defense programs (the President requested \$265.6 billion). In real terms, this bill will authorize \$3.3 billion less than was provided in fiscal year (FY) 1997.

The Wellstone amendment would authorize the Secretary of Defense to transfer \$400 million of the funds appropriated for the Department of Defense for fiscal year 1998 to the Secretary of Veterans' Affairs for the purpose of providing health care benefits to veterans.

Debate was limited by unanimous consent. Following debate, Senator Thurmond moved to table the Wellstone amendment. Generally, those favoring the motion to table opposed the amendment; those opposing the motion to table favored the amendment.

Those favoring the motion to table contended:

The budget agreement that was recently struck with the Administration had the support of the President and broad support within this body. We should not disregard that agreement by lowering the agreed upon level of defense spending. Indeed, many of us already believe that level is too low. Our military forces are showing strains from constrained budgets and too many deployments. Funding for modernization and quality of life initiatives is continually being diverted to pay for current operations. This practice cannot continue without seriously degrading military capabilities.

This year's defense budget represents the lowest percentage of our Gross Domestic Product (GDP) in the last 57 years. Force levels have shrunk from 2.1 million service members at the end of the Cold War to 1.4 million today. Annual spending on defense

(See other side)

YEAS (58)			NAYS (41)			NOT VOTING (1)	
Republicans (50 or 91%)		Democrats (8 or 18%)	Republicans (5 or 9%)	Democrats (36 or 82%)		Republicans (0)	Democrats (1)
Abraham	Hutchinson	Breaux	Campbell	Akaka	Inouye		Mikulski- ²
Allard	Hutchison	Bryan	D'Amato	Baucus	Johnson		
Ashcroft	Inhofe	Glenn	Grassley	Biden	Kennedy		
Bennett	Kempthorne	Graham	Jeffords	Bingaman	Kerrey		
Bond	Kyl	Landrieu	Specter	Boxer	Kerry		
Brownback	Lott	Lieberman		Bumpers	Kohl		
Burns	Lugar	Robb		Byrd	Lautenberg		
Chafee	Mack	Rockefeller		Cleland	Leahy		
Coats	McCain			Conrad	Levin		
Cochran	McConnell			Daschle	Moseley-Braun		
Collins	Murkowski			Dodd	Moynihan		
Coverdell	Nickles			Dorgan	Murray		
Craig	Roberts			Durbin	Reed		
DeWine	Roth			Feingold	Reid		
Domenici	Santorum			Feinstein	Sarbanes		
Enzi	Sessions			Ford	Torricelli		
Faircloth	Shelby			Harkin	Wellstone		
Frist	Smith, Bob			Hollings	Wyden		
Gorton	Smith, Gordon						
Gramm	Snowe						
Grams	Stevens						
Gregg	Thomas						
Hagel	Thompson						
Hatch	Thurmond						
Helms	Warner						

EXPLANATION OF ABSENCE:

- 1—Official Business
- 2—Necessarily Absent
- 3—Illness
- 4—Other

SYMBOLS:

- AY—Announced Yea
- AN—Announced Nay
- PY—Paired Yea
- PN—Paired Nay

in inflation-adjusted dollars has decreased in the last 10 years from \$375 billion to \$250 billion. Over the next few years defense spending will decline even more. Consequently, the just-completed Quadrennial Defense Review is recommending additional force structure reductions of 130,000 military personnel and even larger reductions in key modernization programs. In other words, there will be fewer soldiers to perform the same missions, and they will have less modern weaponry to accomplish those missions. Command Sergeant Major Alley, U.S. Forces Command, summed it up pretty well when he stated, "Our soldiers do not ask for much. What they do ask for is stability in deployments, adequate housing, quality-of-life programs, and adequate compensation." If this body allows this amendment or any other amendment to lower defense spending below what was agreed to in the budget agreement, we will be responsible for the impact on the readiness of our Armed Forces. We will increase the operating tempo and we will not be able to provide the quality of life programs our service members deserve.

We of course agree that the provision of health care to our Nation's veterans is a top priority. However, we do not need to over-work, under-pay, and under-arm current soldiers in order to provide health care to retired ones. Other funding sources exist. The Wellstone amendment would raid the defense budget. For that reason it should be tabled.

Those opposing the motion to table contended:

The Budget Resolution for fiscal year 1998 cut \$400 million out of the budget request of the Secretary of Veterans' Affairs, which was to be used for the purpose of providing health care benefits to veterans. It was not clear to us, nor do we believe it was clear to the majority of Senators, that we were voting for a cut in veterans' health care. We voted to give the Pentagon \$2.6 billion more than it asked for, yet we cut \$400 million for veterans' health care. The Wellstone amendment would give that money back.

Some Senators have argued that taking this money out of defense will hurt military readiness. We believe that the military budget that we have today is far too bloated, as can be easily seen by comparing it to other countries' defense spending. For instance, the United States spends three times as much on defense as do China, Russia, India, Pakistan, and Vietnam combined. In fact, the United States spends nearly twice as much as all of its potential enemies put together spend on defense.

Other Senators have argued that we have already cut enough from defense because defense spending has declined by 40 percent since 1985. Why do they choose to use 1985 as a benchmark? Because 1985 was when we were at the height of our military build-up during the Reagan years. We should not use that date as a benchmark. The Soviet Union no longer exists. Military needs have declined drastically and the military budget should be cut accordingly.

We believe that such a large portion of money goes to the military every year that our national defense is actually being endangered. The amount of money spent on defense exceeds 50 percent of our discretionary budget each year. Every dollar needlessly spent on our Armed Forces is a dollar that could have been spent on education, police, stopping the drug epidemic, or feeding hungry children.

A report by the General Accounting Office (GAO) released in February of this year estimated that the Department of Defense had \$67 billion worth of procured goods in storage. The study estimated that \$41 billion worth of those goods were completely unneeded. The report also revealed that the Pentagon currently has a 100-year supply of 11,000 different items worth over \$1.1 billion. It regularly orders state-of-the-art 1972 electronic items, and, upon receiving them, automatically routes them for disposal.

The Defense Department wastes money and it is overfunded, and the Veterans' Affairs Department is underfunded. Clearly it would not hurt national security to cut \$400 million out of the Defense Department's bloated budget in order to give veterans needed medical care. The Wellstone amendment would authorize that transfer of money. We urge Senators not to table this sensible amendment.